
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 13-11

General Baking Company Bakery (Bond Bread Factory)
2146 Georgia Avenue, N.W.
Square 2877, Lot 0930

Meeting Date: April 25, 2013
Applicant: D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: 1B
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

After careful consideration, the Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the General Baking Company Bakery (Bond Bread Factory) at 2146 Georgia Avenue a Historic Landmark to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. The staff further recommends that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places with a recommendation for listing at the local level of significance with a period of significance extending from 1929, the year the bakery was constructed until 1971, when the building ceased operation as a bakery.



Historical Background

The General Baking Company's Bond Bread Factory was constructed at its present site on Georgia Avenue in 1929 by the General Baking Company. The General Baking Company was a large New York City baking conglomerate that was formed in 1911 through the merger of 21 baking companies in 12 states from the mid-Atlantic, northeast and Mid-west. One of these 21 companies, the Boston Baking Company, operated a bakery in Washington, D.C. at 119 First Street, S.W. since 1899 when the bakery was constructed. Boston Bakery was primarily a producer of bread, and competed with dozens of other such bakeries in the city during the early 20th century.

After the 1911 merger and for the next eight years, the General Baking Company continued to offer the same bread products as the Boston Baking Company. Then, in 1919, General Baking Company introduced its trademark brand—Bond Bread—to Washingtonians. Bond Bread was so-named for the guarantee printed on its wrapping paper affirming that the bread was pure and sanitary, an issue of great concern for the American consumer and the food industry.

When the federal government decided to relocate the U.S. Botanical Garden to the site of the bakery at the foot of Capitol Hill in 1928, the General Baking Company moved its bakery complex to its present site on Georgia Avenue. The site was located near several other bakeries, including the still extant though altered Corby Bakery at 2301 Georgia Avenue; the recently landmarked Dorsch's White Cross Bakery at 641 S Street, and Holzberlein's Bakery on Wiltberger Street adjacent to Dorsch's. As both Dorsch's White Cross Bakery and Corby's Bakery were prominently sited and had relatively new and stylish, architect-designed bakery buildings advertising their businesses, the General Baking Company clearly felt the need to compete. The Company hired Corry B. Comstock of New York, an experienced bakery architect to design its new plant on Georgia Avenue, and in 1929, began construction on the striking white brick and terra cotta structure that served as the company's Washington bakery for the next thirty-two years until it closed in 1971.

Architectural Description

Constructed in 1929, the General Baking Company's Bond Bread Factory is an impressive Art Deco-style industrial building, characterized by its white brick construction, its zigurat configuration and its Deco detailing, including channeled pilasters, recessed panels with decorative brick detailing, and terra cotta trimming. The front elevation, facing east onto Georgia Avenue, is the building's most prominent. Here, a three-story central pavilion with a penthouse is separated by its lower three- and two-story flanking wings by long and narrow piers. These piers rise from the ground level to above the cornice line, accentuating the building's verticality, a distinctive characteristic of the Art Deco style. Despite its unequivocal classification as Art Deco, the building retains an academically correct Classical door surround with a terra cotta architrave and projecting cornice above, supported by scroll modillions. This entry, with flanking metal and glass Art Deco sconces, illustrates the transitional aspect of the Art Deco style of the 1920s, particularly as it pertains to the city's generally modest industrial architecture.

Evaluation

The Bond Bread Factory meets National Register Criterion A because it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history and the development of

the District of Columbia. In particular, the General Baking Company Bakery building provides an excellent illustration of the baking industry of the early 20th century in the city, and more particularly of the trend to build “sanitary” bakeries that responded to the principles of sanitation and nutrition to food safety and public health as it was understood at that time. It also is an important survivor in one of the city’s historically largest and most notable industries, and thus contributes to an understanding of the industrial development of the city and this neighborhood.

The Bond Bread Factory meets National Register Criterion C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction. The Bond Bread Factory not only survives as a premier example of a purpose-built bakery building, it also provides an excellent example of the use of the Art Deco style for an industrial building. According to findings from the D.C. Warehouse Survey (1991-1992), the Bond Bread Factory is one of only a handful of the city’s industrial buildings executed in the Art Deco style. Other, notable Art Deco-inspired industrial buildings include the Atlantic Electric Supply Company building, the C&P Warehouse, and the Buzzard Point Electric Power Company building. In all of these examples, the Art Deco styling is less flamboyant than what is generally found in the city’s Art Deco apartment buildings, but is consistent with the general tendency of industrial design in the city. As noted in the final report for the D.C. Warehouse Survey (March 1991), “industrial buildings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Washington, D.C. exhibit diluted architectural styles, emphasizing their utilitarian and industrial character. Economy of materials and requirements of space generally limited the decorative elements to construction rather than applied materials.”

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the property meets the designation criteria for listing in the DC Inventory and further recommends that the Board forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for listing.